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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAS RATIFIES CAFTA

1. At approximately 11:45 a.m. on Wednesday, March 3, the National Congress of Honduras ratified the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The vote count has not been finalized, but Congressman Jose Toribio Aguilera, member of the CAFTA Committee, told EconChief that the vote was only four opposed, with over one hundred in favor.

2. A final vote count must await the certification of the vote, a formality that normally immediately follows the vote itself but was interrupted today when protesters stormed the Congressional Hall. The protesters, members of the Association of Public Employees (ANDEHP), had been gathered outside the Hall to protest for wage increases. However, when it became clear that a vote on CAFTA was to be held, members of the minority far-left Democratic Union (UD) party reportedly mobilized the protesters and encouraged them to storm the Hall to halt the vote. They did not succeed in halting the vote, but the session has been suspended until police can clear out the protestors.

3. When the session resumes, Congress must certify the vote ("ratificacion del acta"). The ratified agreement will then be transmitted to President Maduro for his signature, likely on Monday. The signed document will then be sent to the Government Ministry for publication in the Gaceta (the Federal Register equivalent.) Upon publication, the ratification takes effect. (CAFTA has also already been ratified by El Salvador, but does not enter into force until the U.S. Congress also ratifies it.)

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